

# Matthew 15

by John Nelson Darby

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*This sermon highlights the contrast between the Jewish system and the true morality of Christ, and it shows how God's heart is fully revealed in Christ, rising above all dispensations to shew full blessing.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 9:12-13, Matthew 15:1-20, Matthew 16:16-18, Mark 7:6-8, Luke 18:9-14, John 4:24, Romans 3:23, Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:8-9

**Topics:** "Grace", "True Morality"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Matthew 15, illustrating the stark moral contrast between the teachings of Christ and the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious system. He emphasizes that the heart of man is the source of all iniquity, and true morality is rooted in the acknowledgment of sin. The sermon highlights Jesus' interactions with a Canaanite woman, showcasing her faith and the grace of God that transcends traditional boundaries. Darby concludes that God's goodness is revealed through Christ, who fulfills His promises while also demonstrating the true condition of humanity. Ultimately, the chapter serves as a profound revelation of God's grace and the moral state of man, setting the stage for the establishment of the church.

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## Transcript

Chapter 15 displays man and God, the moral contrast between the doctrine of Christ and that of the Jews; and thus the Jewish system is rejected morally by God. When I speak of the system, I speak of their whole moral condition, systematised by the hypocrisy that sought to conceal iniquity, while increasing it in the sight of God, before whom they presented themselves. They made use of His name in order to sink lower, under the pretence of piety, than the laws of natural conscience. It is thus that a religious system becomes the great instrument of the power of the enemy, and more especially when that, of which it still bears the name, was instituted by God. But then man is judged, for Judaism was man with God's law and God's culture.

The judgment which the Lord pronounces on this system of hypocrisy, while manifesting the consequent rejection of Israel, gives rise to instruction that goes thus much farther; and which, searching the heart of man, and judging man according to that which proceeds from it, proves the heart to be a spring of all iniquity; and thus makes it evident that all true morality has its basis in the conviction and confession of sin. For, without this, the heart is always false and flatters itself in vain. Thus also Jesus goes to the root of everything, and comes out of the special and temporary relations of the Jewish nation, to enter on the true

morality which belongs to all ages. The disciples did not observe the traditions of the elders; about these the Lord did not concern Himself. He avails Himself of the accusation, to lay it upon the conscience of their accusers, that the judgment occasioned by the rejection of the Son of God was authorised also on the ground of those relationships that already existed between God and Israel. They made the commandment of God of none effect through their traditions; and that in a most important point, and one even on which all earthly blessings depended for the children of Israel. By their own ordinances also Jesus exposes the consummate hypocrisy, the selfishness and avarice, of those who pretended to guide the people, and to form their heart to morality and to the worship of Jehovah. Isaiah had already pronounced their judgment.

Afterwards He shews the multitude that it was a question of what man was, of what proceeded from his heart, from within him; and points out the sad streams that flow from that corrupt spring. But it was the simple truth with respect to the heart of man, as known by God, which scandalised the self-righteous men of the world, which was unintelligible even to the disciples. Nothing so simple as the truth when it is known; nothing so difficult, so obscure, when a judgment is to be formed respecting it by the heart of man, who does not possess the truth; for he judges after his own thoughts, and the truth is not in them. In short, Israel, and specially religious Israel, and true morality are set in contrast: man is set in his proper responsibility, and in his real colours before God.

Jesus searches the heart; but, acting in grace, He acts according to the heart of God, and manifests it by coming out, both for the one and for the other, of the conventional terms of God's relationship with Israel. A divine Person, God, may walk in the covenant He has given, but cannot be confined to it. And the unfaithfulness of His people to it is the occasion of the revelation of Him passing out beyond that place. And note, here, the effect of traditional religion in blinding moral judgment. What clearer or plainer than that what came out of the mouth and heart defiled a man, not what he ate? But the disciples through the vile influence of Pharisaic teaching, putting outside forms for inward purity, could not understand it.

Christ now leaves the borders of Israel, and His disputes with the learned men of Jerusalem, to visit those places which were farthest off from Jewish privileges. He departs into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, the cities which He had Himself used as examples of that which was farthest from repentance; see chapter 11, where He classes them with Sodom and Gomorrah as more hardened than they. A woman comes out of these countries. She was one of the accursed race, according to the principles that distinguished Israel. She was a Canaanite. She comes to beg the interposition of Jesus on behalf of her daughter, who was possessed by a devil.

In begging this favour, she addresses Jesus by the title, which faith knew to be His connection with the Jews—"Son of David." This gives rise to a full development of the Lord's position, and, at the same time, of the conditions under which man might hope to share the effect of His goodness, yea, to the revelation of God Himself.

As the Son of David, He has nothing to do with a Canaanite. He makes her no answer. The disciples desired to get rid of her by granting her request, in order to have done with her importunity. The Lord answers them, that He was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This was indeed the truth. Whatever may have been the counsels of God manifested on occasion of His rejection (see Isaiah 49), He was the minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to fulfil His promises made to the fathers.

The woman, in more simple and direct language, the more natural expression of her feelings, begs for the merciful interposition of Him in whose power she trusted. The Lord answers her, that it is not meet to take

the children's bread and give it to dogs. We see here His true position, as come to Israel; the promises were for the children of the kingdom. The Son of David was the minister of these promises. Could He as such blot out the distinction of the people of God?

But that faith which derives strength from necessity, and which finds no resource but in the Lord Himself, accepts the humiliation of its position, and deems that with Him there is bread for the hunger of those who have no right to it. It perseveres, too, because there is a felt want, and faith in the power of Him who is come in grace.

What had the Lord done by His apparent harshness? He had brought the poor woman to the expression, to the sense, of her real place before God, that is to say, to the truth as to herself. But, then, was it the truth to say that God was less good than she believed, less rich in mercy towards the destitute, whose only hope and trust was in that mercy? This would have been to deny the character and the nature of God, of which He was the expression, the truth, and the witness, on earth; it would have been to deny Himself, and the object of His mission. He could not say, "God has not a crumb for such." He answers, in fulness of heart, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." God comes out of the narrow limits of His covenant with the Jews, to act in His sovereign goodness according to His own nature. He comes out to be God in goodness, and not merely Jehovah in Israel.

But this goodness is exercised towards one who is brought, in the presence of that goodness, to know that she has no right to it. To this point the seeming harshness of the Lord had been leading her. She received all from grace, while in herself unworthy of all. It is thus, and thus only, that every soul obtains blessing. It is not merely the sense of need-the woman had that from the beginning, it was that which brought her there. It is not sufficient merely to own that the Lord Jesus can meet that need-the woman came with that acknowledgment; we must be in the presence of the only source of blessing, and be brought to feel that, although we are there, we have no right to avail ourselves of it. And this is a terrible position. When it comes to this, all is grace. God can then act according to His own goodness, and He answers every desire which the heart can form for its happiness.

Thus we see Christ here as a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to fulfil the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles also might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written. At the same time this last truth makes manifest the real condition of man, and the full and perfect grace of God. On this He acts, while still faithful to His promises; and the wisdom of God is displayed in a manner that calls forth our admiration.

We see how much the introduction, in this place, of the story of the Syro-Phenician woman develops and illustrates this part of our Gospel. The beginning of the chapter shews forth the moral condition of the Jews, the falseness of Pharisaic and sacerdotal religiousness; brings out the real state of man as man, what the heart of man was the source of; and then reveals the heart of God as manifested in Jesus. His dealings with this woman display the faithfulness of God to His promises; and the blessing finally granted exhibits the full grace of God, in connection with the manifestation of the real condition of man, acknowledged by conscience-grace rising above the curse which lay upon the object of this grace-rising above everything to make itself a way to the need which faith presented to it.

The Lord now departs thence and goes into Galilee, the place where He was in connection with the despised remnant of the Jews. It was neither Zion, nor the temple, nor Jerusalem, but the poor of the flock, where the people were sitting in gross darkness (Isaiah 8, 9). Thither His compassions follow this

poor remnant, and are again exercised in their behalf. He renews the evidences, not only of His tender mercies, but of His presence who satisfied the poor of His people with bread. Here however it is not in the administrative power which He could bestow on His disciples, but according to His own perfection and acting from Himself. He provides for the remnant of His people. Accordingly it is the fulness of seven baskets of fragments that is gathered up. He departs also without anything else taking place.

We have seen eternal morality, and truth in the inward parts, substituted for the hypocrisy of forms, man's use of legal religion and man's heart shewn to be a source of evil and nought else, God's heart fully revealed that rises above all dispensation to shew full grace in Christ. Thus dispensations are set aside though fully owned, and man and God fully shewn out in doing so. It is a wonderful chapter as to what is everlasting in truth as to God, and as to what the revelation of God shews man to be. And this, note, gives occasion to the revelation of the assembly in the next chapter, which is not a dispensation but founded on what Christ is, Son of the living God. In chapter 12 Christ was dispensationally rejected, and the kingdom of heaven substituted in chapter 13. Here man is set aside and what he had made of law, and God acts in His own grace above all dispensations. Then come the assembly and the kingdom in glory.

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